

FICTION and POETRY by:

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Luke Gelber
Elisabeth Giffin
Jayme Hughes
Holly Knouff
Nicholas Lewandowski
Lauren Mallett
Brandon McAdams
Matthew Miller
Halle Murcek
Dan Sweat
Ellie Swenson



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I who have always believed too much in words

W.S. Merwin

MATTHEW MILLER

SEASON CRACKING

A note in the church bulletin asks us to pray
for our troops'. I circle

the apostrophe out of habit, shift a friend's
pocketknife — left behind

after two hours of shooting on an ice-dry
December afternoon. A jacket

bunched to couch the rifle, a sloppy set of rings
sketched on the cardboard

of a Christmas ornament box. We scrabbled in frost-
limp grass for the empties.

The chill snuck into thighs where they pressed
the ground. I wonder, now,

if they were already practicing — if the laughing

at a miss was a cover. If

their aim wavers as some rust-heap drifts to a stop
ten feet from the checkpoint,

its driver slumped, kaffiyehed, dribbling blood.

I don't know if they remember

that cold of Ohio's snow-dusted December earth
on their thighs as an IED

turns the chassis into liquid and splinters. Into
them. I remember

the sting of sawgrass and ice on our fingers
as we combed for brass.

Their heat almost thawed the dirt they clung to.

We could never find them all.

NICHOLAS LEWANDOWSKI

PSYCHOANALYSIS

She had fallen asleep
on the couch
with the light of the television
playing across her face –
scenes from the R-Rated movie
she let me watch
in spite of my parents' instructions.

Toy soldiers and plastic martians
were strewn across the floor,
struggling to negotiate
their carpeted battlefield
as I indulged my eight years worth
of historic sensibility:
Space Invaders versus Nazis.

Then I heard her sigh,
a soft exhale
that lingered in the air.

I turned
from the plastic martian holocaust
in time to see her shift
on the couch, still asleep.

I stared, fascinated
by her bare feet,
her neatly painted nails,
the auburn hair that hung
just against her shoulder,
brushing skin left unobstructed
by her black tank top.

And when I turned
back to my soldiers
a wounded Oberfeldwebel
caught my eye.

THE LIFE YOU LEARN FROM

After several interruptions and no-you-go-aheads, my father laughed and said, "Son, us Sweatts, we're terrible communicators when we're passionate about something." A line like that earned him the right to speak, and he began to read over his life like an obituary written just before deadline. I could recite it for him, having heard most of it before: leaving Cincinnati quickly, selling his guitars, letting her go. He says he tells me things because his father didn't. His father arrested criminals, chased skirts, and did little else. He speaks to me, hoping I see him as a hero who saved me from his own hell. But a father is not a hero; he is the life you learn from.

PHANTOM

Daniel didn't want to lie on his back. With the back of his head on the pillow, he couldn't feel the texture of the scratchy, white hospital sheets on his cheek. He rolled over onto his side.

He liked feeling as much and as often as possible. A week and a half ago, he was running full-blast, shooting and getting shot. Now he was lying on his back in a blank hospital, with blank emotion, and one blank sleeve. When he lost his left arm, he lost what seemed like half of his sense of touch; because of this, he liked to feel the scratchy sheets.

But as much as Daniel wanted to feel these days, he was unwilling to experience his surroundings. The dreary veterans' hospital was depressing as hell: whispers bounced off white walls; the nurses appeared to be more dead than the patients. He didn't want to feel any gloomier, so he rarely opened his eyes.

The change from combat to bed had been jarring. He felt like a corpse, a pod – a space-filler. He wasn't even sure that he was still alive for the first few hours, and he was afraid to ask.

Luckily, he had paid attention in Intro to Philosophy. *I think, therefore I exist*, he reassured himself.

This philosophy didn't make sense when it came to his left arm, though. Although it wasn't even there, it hurt more than anything had hurt in his life. The imaginary fingers were buried in the imaginary palm; the imaginary hand was twisted and clenched like a crusty old gym sock. The doctors at the center had been looking into treatments because, they determined, these phantom pains were too severe to ignore.

I feel my arm; therefore, it doesn't exist, he thought, then let out a

dispirited chuckle.

Beyond the physical pain, there was more pain – the thought of never swimming, never playing basketball again. Most of all, his fifteen-year-old dream of being a concert pianist was destroyed.

Daniel opened his eyes. His best friend, the man who had been by him all through combat, was on the bed next to him. Jake had gotten shot in the butt – not too serious, but enough for a hospital stay. Basically, Jake had explained, he couldn't dress his wound, so he had to stick around.

He saw Jake's eyes were open.

"Hey," Daniel said quietly.

Jake's head turned. "What's up, man?" he asked.

Daniel sighed. "Just thinking about how I won't be able to play the piano anymore."

"You play the piano, man?" Jake said. "That's cool."

He had been saying strange things like that since they had been in the hospital.

"You knew that," Daniel said. "I've told you a million times."

Jake laughed. "If you say so, man," he said. "How good were you?"

"Pretty good, I guess."

"Why did you join the military?" Jake asked. "Weren't you worried about wrecking your hands?"

Daniel made a mental note to mention Jake's forgetfulness to the nurse again. He had already told her about it, but she hadn't done anything. He was convinced Jake had some kind of memory loss.

"I joined ROTC in college so I could pay for school," Daniel said. "I didn't really think I'd ever end up fighting in a war."

"Well," Jake said, "It's not your fault. The war shouldn't have happened anyway."

This, Daniel thought, was such a drastic change in Jake. During combat, he had been very enthusiastic about the war. Now, in the hospital, he was like a completely different person. *It must be the memory loss*, Daniel thought.

"Think about it," Jake said insistently. "The war started on false premises. It was conceived on false premises. We weren't fighting for anything real. Did you see that Fahrenheit movie, man? In ten years, the government is going to realize its mistake. In fifteen, they'll erase it from the textbooks. When they can, they'll erase it from our minds. It'll be like it never even happened."

Annoyed, Daniel cut in. "It happened," he said. "People will remember it."

"But how will they know it happened?" Jake asked. "Sometimes people think they remember things that didn't happen."

Sometimes they don't remember things that did happen, Daniel thought.

"It's like that ol' stump you've got there," Jake added. "Hurts like hell, but it ain't there. See?"

Daniel was sick of the conversation. He didn't want to hear that the war that he had lost his arm to was pointless. He rolled onto his back, away from Jake. He closed his eyes, and either blinked or slept for hours. He didn't have a clock so he couldn't really tell. It didn't matter, anyway.

When he opened his eyes, the blond nurse was standing over him. She wanted him to come with her.

"We're going to try some therapy," she explained as she helped him out of bed. "We're going to work on that phantom pain."

As she led him out of the room, he passed twenty veterans. Ten on the left, ten on the right. None of them moved. They were stationed very

close to one another. He briefly wondered if he was in the dead-people room, and if he was dead.

The nurse led Daniel down the hall. In the middle of the white, high-ceilinged room he saw a doctor and a box.

"Hi," the doctor said. "I'm Dr. Pechardo." She extended her arm.

"Daniel, ma'am" he replied, and shook her hand.

"Well," she said kindly. "here's the plan. I need you to sit on this chair, and put your arm straight forward and through this hole." She gestured towards the box, which had a hole in one of its five cardboard sides. There was no top, and there was a mirror on the left side.

Daniel sat down in front of the box and placed his arm – formerly known as "his right arm," but now, apparently, just "his arm" – through the hole. Dr. Pechardo adjusted the chair so that he could see both his arm on the right side and its mirror image on the left side.

She gestured up to the observation deck, where a few tired-looking doctors sat. Seconds later, classical music came streaming into the room.

Dr. Pechardo stood at his side. "I want you to relax," she said, "and move your arm as though you are conducting an orchestra to this music. Use the mirror image and your imagination to pretend that you are using both arms in coordination."

Daniel was conducting before she finished the instructions. And it worked: the second the false image of his phantom arm met his brain's desire to conduct the music; he felt his other hand relax. His hand opened completely as he progressed through the song.

He closed his eyes, and lost himself in the music.

After two pieces by Stravinsky and one by Mozart, Dr. Pechardo tapped him on the shoulder. The music stopped.

She sat down on a chair next to him.

"How does your arm feel?" she asked.

"Relaxed," he replied.

"But you can still feel it?"

"Yeah, but it doesn't hurt."

She made a note on her chart.

"We're going to continue this therapy," she said. "Over time, you won't feel anything at all."

Daniel was startled. "Why?" he asked. "It feels fine." He didn't like the idea of letting go of these last sensations.

"Within the next two or three hours, your hand will begin to tighten and twist again," she said. "The only real, long-term solution is to repeat the therapy until all the sensations go away. Otherwise, you will feel this pain for the rest of your life."

He didn't have time to process it all. The blond nurse came back into the room with the same, pleasant smile on her face.

"It's time to go to your psychiatrist," she said cheerily.

Daniel hated the shrink.

"Alright," he sighed. He removed his arm from the box and stood up.

He didn't want to go. He hated sitting and talking while the shrink took notes. He hated the shrink's pretend sympathy. If the shrink nodded his head once more, it would fall off.

To the shrink he went. Reluctantly.

Dr. Johnson asked about Daniel's feelings, and Daniel looked around the room. He didn't like being around the short, squirrely-looking man, but he liked being in his office. In a sea of hospital whiteness, Johnson's office was a kaleidoscope. Bright paintings adorned

the walls, multicolored books lined the shelves, and trinkets and knickknacks filled in the spaces between.

"I really like the therapy," Daniel said aloud. He wasn't sure what question he was answering, but Johnson had stopped talking, and he was sure he was supposed to say something.

"This therapy?" Johnson asked, his eyebrows knit in confusion.

"No," Daniel said. "My arm therapy."

"You don't have the arm, remember?" Johnson said gently.

Daniel rolled his eyes. "It's a new treatment for phantom pain." He explained the process.

When he was finished, Johnson nodded deliberately, and looked at his notepad. "Daniel, I think that we have some more important issues to discuss," he said.

This was therapy session four, and they hadn't discussed anything substantial.

"Let's open a dialogue about Jake. Are you still confused about his behavior?"

Yes, I'm confused. Who wouldn't be? Daniel thought.

"Yes," he said.

Johnson shifted in his chair. "Let's return to your last memories of combat," he said. "What do you remember of Jake?"

Daniel sifted through the fragments of that night. "Well, I guess I was driving, and Jake was next to me. That's all I remember. When I woke up in the hospital, the doctor said that a roadside bomb had gone off. That the left side of my body had been thrown against the side of the humvee, and my arm was crushed."

Johnson peered at Daniel over his glasses.

"And Jake?" he asked.

"He was next to me in the hospital, just like he has been since we

arrived."

Johnson picked a folder up off his desk. He opened it and slowly turned a page, then another. He turned three more pages, quickly ruffled back through two of them, and looked up.

"You said the bomb went off on the right side of the car, and that Jake was in the passenger's seat?" Johnson asked.

Suddenly, scenes rushed back into Daniel's mind. Jake in the passenger's seat. Lying in the car, watching Jake bleed to death in the passenger's seat. Jake's burnt skin and hair suffocating him, and the heat from the explosion singing his skin. He remembered the other six soldiers in his section following in their vehicles, and dragging him out of the car. He saw his screams echo off of their terrified faces, saw his arm leak blood and bone, saw the medics cover Jake with a sheet. He remembered people running around, and then the inside of an ambulance.

Instead of telling Johnson these things, he cried.

Johnson was quiet at first, but Daniel kept going for a few minutes, and the Doctor wanted to explain. "The man who sleeps in the hospital bed next to you is Marcell Jones. You have never met him before. You're suffering from post-traumatic stress, so you repeatedly misidentify him."

It was too much for Daniel. His head was exploding, and he couldn't stop crying. He could feel the nurse take him by the arm and lead him to a room and to a bed. He slept for hours.

He woke up to a nurse with a chart. He was in a private room with muted blue walls and a television set. He was hooked up to a heart rate monitor, and he had a throbbing headache.

"Where am I now?" he asked her.

"Well, that is the question, isn't it?" she said. "Let me ask you this, where do you think you are?"

"Well, judging from your hospital nametag, I'm still in the hospital. After my freak out today, I figure I'm probably in the psych ward."

"Honey, that was yesterday," she said. "You've been sleeping for a while. Actually, you were sedated for a while." She noticed his frown. "Oh, don't be too hard on yourself."

She began folding the blankets at the end of his bed. "Yes, you're near the psych ward, but that's just because we thought you'd like to have your own room. You've been through a lot."

"You bet I have," he said. "I'm feeling an arm that doesn't exist and a friend that doesn't exist. All because of a war that, apparently, never really existed."

She shook her head. "Shame," she mumbled. "Your left arm and your right-hand man."

When she was done folding, she told him that it was time for physical therapy.

"Can't I skip today?" he asked.

"Wishful thinking," she said. "Get up."

She marched him down to his therapy room. Dr. Pechardo was there again, but instead of a box, there was a small piano keyboard.

"Daniel!" Dr. Pechardo said excitedly. "It's good to see you. I thought we'd try something new. Here, sit down."

He sat. No use in arguing.

"When I found out that you play the piano, I thought of this. Here, close your eyes. Come on – good. Now – music!" she called off to someone. A stream of "Für Elise" came tinkering into the room. "Do you know this song?"

Daniel nodded.

"Keep your eyes closed and play with both hands," she said.

He began to play the right-hand part along with the left-hand recording. His felt his phantom fingers unclench, and his whole body relax. His fingers let go of the pain, his mind let go of the pain, and he immersed himself in the melody.

ELLIE SWENSSON

FACELESS

Neon lights flash

Once home, men sleep,

To attract the desperate,

Gold rings safely on,

Advertising all the boy can give.

Next to beautiful women.

Men enter at will,

The boy enters at will

Ghosts passing through.

A ghost lingering.

They steal from him.

He claims them.

Violently, hastily -

Silently,

They steal from him.

He claims them.

In small rooms with no windows,

In soft beds with empty love,

They steal from him.

He claims them.

LAUREN MALLET

US ROUTE 2

My sister and I

made crayon copies

in that cemetery down the road,

pressed our paper and wax

along the limestone grooves.

Our dear Drowned, 1872 etched

in burnt sienna. The rest of

the rock so eaten away,

shrouded by molding coral crusts.

No color can make sense of names,

dates for the dead

taken by the wind.

She rubbed harder,

believing we could summon the stone.

HOLLY KNOUFF

CHORD PAINTING IN A MINOR

Like stretching sundown shadows
Cast from forlorn architecture,
Draping themselves bluely over
tired cobbled roads,
Where a secret lover strolls
And sighs for tomorrow's loss,
While the light is stingingly sweet
And the sky unbearably red.

HALLE MURCEK

HANDS

It is still a mystery who I have inherited my hands from. They do not resemble my mother's or father's nor their parents. But I hope they age the way my grandmother's hands have. I spent my childhood memorizing every part of them, the surface of her palms and the lines that undulate and swerve across her joints.

Hers are muted and pearly in the light, holding tranquility in her palms. Their shape is one that time cultivates, weathered and worn.

My young hands are showing the beginnings of calluses. I have been told I can stop a stranger if my hands are at use. They can make a simple task worth watching, captivating even.

Her flesh, with its balmy folds and puckers, seems as if it has just been laid across her bones like paper mache.

My hands remind me of blown glass and Christmas ornaments. They appear delicate and weak, but conceal resilience that has withstood oven burns, paper cuts, and chapped winter air.

My grandmother's palms trap scents of basil and mint from cooking supper or pulling weeds from her herb garden.

The tips of my fingers and the spaces between them absorb the scent of perfume from hurried spritzes and coffee as I sop up the foam from the bottom of my daily cappuccino. The dull hint of flowers and espresso beans lingers all day. Sometimes I rest my hand across my mouth, just below my lower lip, so I can inhale it.

Her knuckles are uncultured pearls extracted from fresh oysters, silken with a dull sheen. The skin that stretches over them fades in hue when she makes a fist or curls her fingers around crochet hooks. They are iridescent in the light.

I like how easily my knuckles crack. Using my thumb as leverage, I push each finger into my palm until the joint readjusts with a satisfying pop. This habit makes some cringe, shiver, or cover their ears. My mother yells. "Your gorgeous hands are going to end up ruined and deformed like mine!" She shoves her hands under my nose. Her knuckles bulge from her fingers that bend at odd angles. The ovals of her fingernails are misshapen and different, uneven lengths. My mother's hands remind me of pieces of shrapnel or the knotted roots of an ancient tree. They are beautiful in a way I think driftwood and beach glass are beautiful — natural weathered from earth, and imperfect, just like her mothers.

My grandmother's hands have rivulets of indigo veins I used to squeeze between my small fingertips. I loved how they felt as I pressed them down, cutting off the blood flow until I lifted my fingertip.

My blood vessels are only visible when I'm cold. Azure against olive flesh, thin and flowing like raindrop trails on a car window.

My grandmother would encase my hand in hers, enveloping it in a swaddle. I remember her hands, internal heat that never dulled.

My hands are made like hers, made to rub and massage, knead tense muscles on his torso, roll ovals into the fleshy part of his back with the heels of my palms, scrunch his shoulders with my fingers. I like how his muscles turn into something malleable with the warmth of my hands, like silly putty or clay, allaying under the power of my exertion.

Imperfections: I hate how they swell in the heat: how the rings I feel naked without become just snug enough that I have to soap my hands to slide them off. Typing, writing and cooking are a struggle when my fingers are engorged from summer humidity. They refuse to bend, and feel as if the skin across my knuckles will split open and ooze like blisters, become clumsy, fumble and falter at even the simplest tasks, like holding a pencil, brushing my teeth, or painting my nails. The tools becomes entangled between the spaces on each hand, falling to the floor or counter

where I pick it up, only to fumble again. And if I try to make a fist, or splay my fingers across the steering wheel of my car, my flesh stretches across my bones and aches more than the joints themselves, like leather or sheep's skin desiccated on a frame. I hate the hangnails and cracked edges of cuticles that fray near the bed of my nail. I bite or tear at them until they well up with blood, until they are sore for days after and I have to rub Vaseline to alleviate and coax them.

BRANDON MCADAMS

HURRICANE IKE'S DETRITUS

AS DEPICTED TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2008

A tire on a wheel, no car —
a pot of water, no stove —
a hose, no spigot —
concrete bricks, no wall —
a tarp with nothing to cover —
two stone steps that lead to a puddle —

there is, of course, more
in this front page frame
that's "fit to print."

There is a man because
what would stories be
without the players?
Can a photographer's vision be so selective
without capturing a human pulse?

Isn't that why the press
focuses not on winds
that sandblast the products
of a 700,000-year-old eruption
just south of Mono Lake;
nor the downpours that dissolve
feldspars in frozen magma chambers
near 2 billion years old?
And why would they?
that is not news.

And this storm wouldn't be,
but for the homes built into its path.

And there must be some strand of coast
that isn't Galveston,
or Crystal Beach, or High Island
that we'll never see in pictures
or words.

But I bet there's a man
or a woman, maybe both, there.
And I have to wonder if,
like this man in the paper,
they are stepping into a puddle,
searching for a kitchen;

or are they lying still
in the storm-strewn debris,
eyes fixed to a sky
that will bring more clouds
to wash away their history?

MATTHEW MILLER

PAUL'S CASTING OUT OF DEMONS

'SIRS, WHAT MUST I DO, THAT I MAY BE SAVED?'

-ACTS 16:30

There are hymns on the stones
of Philippi. Trickling through streets,
Greek or Aramaic, lilting. Uplifting
even before gates open and foundations
crumble, lime-soft, at God's behest.
Cries that these men are servants
of the Most High God, who declare
to us a way of salvation already
days silenced. A slave girl — not Judean;
a Scythian, or Gaul — feels the press
of limestone through the goatskins
beneath her, the dust-laced weight
of a Galatian trader on her hips.
Her voice exorcised, commanded
in the name of Jesus Christ

to come forth from her. Her part
performed, the audience drifting
to beatings and miracles
and a visit to Thessalonica.
Now only God is watching.

THE LANGUAGE OF TOUCH

Shopping at the open-air market two blocks
from my grandmother's house, it's all about touch
she says, running her swollen hands over the boxes
of avocados like a concert pianist across the keys.

I am too confined in my own mind,

prone to standing there and looking instead of plunging
my hands into the crates of peaches, the baskets
of blueberries, the beds of ice on which fresh fish lay –
red snappers, yellowtails, Atlantic blue fin tuna.

A physical process: her hands flutter like a bamboo fan.

She squeezes a peach, gazing into it like a crystal ball,
searching its skin for her fingerprints, evidence of its ripeness.

Before my grandfather died, they browsed
the outdoor bazaars every week after temple,
my grandfather the master at sniffing a fish

to tell its freshness, especially after the cataracts
clouded over both his eyes. The only places he went –
temple, then the market, standing firmly
at my grandmother's side, fingers threaded
through hers. Everywhere else my grandmother

walked on her own, my grandfather left
at home under his orange afghan, his fingers
grazing the pages of the books my mother brought him
the way hers would skim across tomato skins.

The configuration of bumps that mean nothing to me

shrink the world to fit under the pad of his finger,
and he reads it the way he read the history
of a mango on its rind. After he lost his sight,
he always found the sweetest ones, full of juice
that ran down your chin like a waterfall.

"BARTLEBY AND BESS"

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

CHARACTERS:

BARTLEBY.....40s-50s

BESS.....30s-40s

"BARTLEBY AND BESS"

Bartleby: Hi. (A long pause, he looks around awkwardly.) I'm...uh, (shakes head, becomes silent. Noise offstage. He gets up. Silence. Returns to seat.)

It's been, uh, 408 days since...well, since we've, you know. Well, no you don't know, how could you know? No one knows. I don't know...408 days. That's approximately 1 year and uh, well, 408 minus 365 would be uh...You don't care do you? She didn't either. That's why its been 1 year andwell. (Sound offstage.) I wish I knew why it's been so long. Part of me thinks that I do know why...the other part of me knows that I don't. Is it hot in here? I feel hot. I hope I'm not coming down with something. I left my thermometer at home when I left this morning. I hope I'm

not coming down with something. I feel hot.

Gah. My mouth tastes so dry. I had some crackers on the plane. Crackers can make a person's mouth so dry. You need to drink plenty of fluids when you're having crackers. I didn't have enough water with my crackers earlier because I only got the one cup from the stewardess on the plane. I don't like airplanes. I had to take one to get here. I don't, don't like them. If we were supposed to fly then we'd be able to without being jammed into a tiny little seat that's got gum stuck to it and about this much leg room. And someone always does the crossword on the Inflight magazine wrong. And in pen. Always in pen. Stupid people love pens. I use pencil.

It's not really lead in pencils, you know. It's graphite. I always want to tell people that. But then I'll notice that they're carrying a pen and I know they wouldn't understand. Because they're stupid. She used to write in ink...I should have known then. I don't like pens. Everything's permanent with a pen, unless you use one of those erasable kinds and those are just...imposters. To the pencils. Pencils erase. Pencils allow for change. Pens don't. She didn't allow for change. Do you know, it's been 408 days since we last saw each other? 408 days...that's a lot of time to change. And she'll walk in here, take one look at me, and announce that I look the same. And I don't. I've changed. This tie? It's new. These shoes? I never wore these shoes with her! But she won't notice that. She'll come in and say, Bart, you haven't changed one bit. And she'll

smile and come towards me with her arms out and her hair will fall just so. And then I'll try to explain to her that I have changed. I'll point out my shoes and my tie. And through my explanation we'll both realize that she is right, and that I haven't changed at all.

Bess: Bartleby?

Bartleby: You came.

Bess: Of course.

Bartleby: You're 12 minutes late.

Bess: That must mean that you were 11 minutes early. (Laughs.)
You haven't changed one bit! How long has it been?

Bartleby: 408—

Bess: --Oh! It's so good to see you! How have you been?

Bartleby: I've been fine. And yourself?

Bess: Just great! Oh we have so much to catch up on! Oh, I almost forgot! I brought you something. (She begins digging around in her purse, removing items, one by one: glasses, gum, a pencil, etc. Finally she finds a small wrapped package.)

Bartleby: You have a pencil.

Bess: Yes. But...

Bartleby: May I? (He gestures towards her. Thinking he wants the pencil, she nods and hands it to him. He reaches instead for her hand, letting the pencil drop to the floor. They remain holding hands.)

BLACKOUT.

LUKE GELBER

DESERTER'S LONGING

HERMOSILLO 1913

I peeled a mango in the fields
outside León and handed it

to you, letting sun-congealed juice
roll down your arms. Lo siento

I said, but you licked your fingers
and shrugged. No te preocupes –

the only safe way to eat these
is naked, lying in a tub.

Here, miles from the howl of war
fruit hangs heavy on bloated boughs

like the shoulders of fusiliers.
I pluck a mango in the shade,

slice it endwise and wrench the pit
from both halves like a warm bullet.

I imagine sitting naked
in a bathtub with you, your back

and long black hair pressed to my chest,
your teeth drawing soft, radiant chunks

of flesh from the tip of my knife
while gold juice glazes your bare neck.

DAN SWEATT

ROLLING ROCK

I go to the bars to watch the people
that I don't know. I sit by myself,
order Rolling Rocks until last call,
and think about whether they think
of me. I've seen groups that shimmy
to non-dancing songs, like wind chimes
that clamor when the back door
slams shut. There are women
who buy drinks for men, undeterred
by wedding rings and hand-holding,
needing something just for tonight
and not tomorrow. They are regulars,
like me now. I've been coming too often,
my friends say, but it's hard to stop
once you've started, like a rolling rock.

I go to the bars to watch the people.

JAYME HUGHES

FAITH

Imagine: the whale calf stranded
in the waters north of Sydney.
The local newspapers report
the whale's attempts to suckle from
a yacht afloat in the bay,

the knobby head bumping against
the boat's hull, seeking milk. After
two days, the obvious: the calf
won't abandon the craft he has
decided is his mother.

Anesthetic, a fatal dose:
necessary so the whale will
not suffer, will not starve, lost
and alone, shark-bitten, adrift
in shallow water. All efforts

to lure him out to sea fail as
the crowd at shore's edge grows quiet.
And isn't that love? Faith, no matter
how fruitless? Abiding despite
the temptation, the cost?